Political Science 338: Policy Analysis

Spring, 2020
Professor Stein
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Tue./Thurs. 9:25-10:40AM
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Office Hours: Tue./Thurs. 11AM-12PM

Course overview and goals

This course has five aims: (1) provide an overview of the nature of causality; (2) examine how causality is used in public policy research and practice; (3) highlight the role of different quantitative methods in the search for causality; (4) demonstrate how to choose from among alternative methods and designs for evaluating public policies and (5) provide the political and social context for how policy analysis is conducted and used. After this course, you should understand and be able to apply the standard set of research tools for evaluating public policies.

Required texts and reading:

**Shahidur R. Khandker, Gayatri B. Koolwal and Hussain A. Samad, *Handbook on Impact Evaluation*, World Bank

** Weimer, D and Vining, A.R., *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practices* (any edition, selected readings).

**Donald Stanley and Julian Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*

Houston Chronicle (Daily)

Wall Street Journal or New York Times (Daily)

** Readings on the course Canvass website

Assignments:

1. A midterm examination: 30% of course grade
2. Two problem sets: 30% of course grade (@15% each assignment)
3. Final team research assignment: 25% of course grade
4. "Causal Claim of the Week": identify causal claim made in the news; summarize evidence provided; what would be ideal experiment? One-page (double-spaced). 15%

Grade Policies

Your grade in this class will be determined by class participation, two short assignments, one exams, 'causal claim' assignment and a final term project. I do not explicitly grade attendance because it is a baseline expectation. Multiple missed classes without a legitimate reason like illness, family emergency, etc. will be reflected in a lower class participation score. Mere attendance, though, is baseline but not enough to ensure a good class participation grade. Your active engagement and contributions are critical to this course. Class participation is facilitated by discussion of the assigned readings, daily "causal claim of the week,' and team presentations.

99-100 A+
93-98 A
90-92 A-
88-89 B+
83-87 B
80-82 B-
78-79 C+
73-77 C
70-72 C-
68-69 D+
63-67 D
60-62 D

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Disability Resource Center (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

No laptops, please, for all the same reasons your other instructors have made that request. Two exceptions: 1. If you need a laptop for an accessibility or accommodation need, please let me know! 2. There also may be a day or two when we use them in class for an exercise. I'll give you plenty of warning. Thank you, in advance, for helping me with this request.

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/.

The syllabus, readings and course schedule is subject to change over the course of the semester. Where appropriate and needed, I may add additional readings. I will communicate changes in advance.

Course schedule

Part 1: Policy analysis: An Introduction

January 14, 16

Topics:
Policy making process
Policy subsystems

Readings:
Weimer and Vining, Chapter 2

January 21, 23, 30 (No class on January 28)

Topics:

The electoral connection
Punctuated equilibrium theory
Rationales for Public Policy

Readings:

**Bryan Jones and Frank Baumgartner. 2012. "From there to here: Punctuated Equilibrium to the General Punctuation Thesis to a Theory of Government Information Processing," *The Policy Studies Journal* 40(1) 2012:1-1.
**Weimer and Vining, Chapters 4-7

Part 2: Causal inference

February 4, 6, 11

Topics:
Covariation
Omitted variables
Conditional relationships
Observational studies

Readings:

**Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler. 2007. "The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network over 32 years." *New England Journal of Medicine*. 357:370-379.

**Ethan Cohen-Cole and Jason M. Fletcher. 2008. "Detecting implausible social

network effects in acne, height and headaches: longitudinal analysis." *BMJ*
**Angrist, J. D., & Pischke, J. S. (2008). *Mostly harmless econometrics: An empiricist's companion*: Princeton University Press. Chapter 2 (pages 11-24). *(Available online in book preview.)*
**Firebaugh, G. (2018). *Seven rules for social research*. Princeton University Press. Read pages 120-129 only.

FIRST PROBLEM SET DUE FEBRUARY 18

February 18, 20, 25

Topics:

Research Design
Data collection and analysis
Cost-benefit analysis

Readings:

**Weimer and Vining, Chapters, 8-13
**"What is a Research Design?"
**"Steps for Successful Policy Analysis"
**Khandker et al, Chapter 2: Basic Issues of Evaluation
**Remler, D.K., & Van Ryzin, G.G. (2015). Research Methods in Practice: Strategies forDescription and Causation. Sage Publications. Read pages 358 to 367.

MIDTERM EXAMINATION FEBRUARY 27

Part 3: Policy evaluation tools and methods

March 3, 5,

Topics:

Experiments
Difference-in-difference

Readings:

Khandker et al, Chapter 12, 14
**Campbell and Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*
**Todd, Petra, and Kenneth Wolpin. 2006. "Assessing the Impact of a School Subsidy Program in Mexico:Using a Social Experiment to Validate a Dynamic Behavioral Model of Child Schooling and
Fertility." *American Economic Review* 96 (5): 1384–417.

**Gerber, Alan S. & Donald P. Green. 2000. "The Effect of Nonpartisan Get-Out-the Vote Drive: An Experimental Study of Leafletting." *Journal of Politics* 462 (3):
**Moffitt, Robert. 2003. "The Role of Randomized Field Trials in Social Science Research: A Perspective from Evaluations of Reforms from Social Welfare Programs." NBER Technical Working Paper 295, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

March 10, 12

Topics:

Propensity matching

Readings:

Khandker et al, Chapter 13
**Stein, Robert & Greg Vonnahme. 2008. "Engaging the Unengaged Voter: Vote Centers and Voter Turnout." *The Journal of Politics* 70 (2): 487–497
**Chen, Shaohua, Ren Mu, and Martin Ravallion. 2008. "Are There Lasting Impacts of Aid to Poor Areas? Evidence for Rural China." Policy Research Working Paper 4084, World Bank, Washington, DC.

March 24, 26, 31, April 2

Topics:

Instrumental variables
Regression discontinuity

Readings:

Khandker et al, Chapter 15,16
**Green, Donald P. and Daniel Winik. "Estimating the Effects of Incarceration and Probation on Recidivism among Drug Offenders." In 2010. *Criminology*. 48(2): 357-387.
**David Card and Alan B. Krueger. 1994. "Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast-Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania." *American Economic Review* 84:772-
**Gerber, Elizabeth and Daniel J. Hopkins. 2011. "When Mayors Matter: Estimating the Impact of Mayoral Partisanship on City Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 55 (2): 326–339
**Robert Stein, Birnur Buzcu-Guven, Leonardo-Duenas-Osorio and Devika Subramanian. 2014. "The private and social benefits of preparing for natural disasters," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 32:459-483.

Part 4: Designing policy evaluations

April 7, 9

Topic:

Briefing policy case studies

Readings: [SELECT TWO TO READ AND PREPARE FOR CLASS DISCUSSION]

**Houston Parks and Recreation Department #1: Keeping parks safe for users
**Houston Public Library: Neighborhood library use
**Under wear for everyone
**City of Houston SafeClear Program: Balancing safety and congestion
**Historic Preservation
**Vote by mail elections
**Locating Women and Infant care facilities
**Blood pressure guidelines
**Algorithms and criminal justice system
**Flooding remedies in Houston

SECOND PROBLEM SET DUE APRIL 10

April 14, 16

Topic:

Policy evaluation team meetings

Readings:

Policy cases

April 21, 23

Policy team presentations

FINAL POLICY TEAM EVALUATION DUE MAY 6